



Arkansas House Newsletter

November 12, 2021

National Adoption Month



Right now, there are about 349 children and teens in Arkansas whose parents' parental rights have been terminated and are currently seeking a forever family.

November is National Adoption Month. It is a time to encourage others to learn about adoption and recognize the many children who are still waiting.

Recently, the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) launched the Every Day Counts campaign as a reminder for people that every day these children and teens spend in foster care is a day too long because every day counts!

The agency says the most significant needs right now are families for sibling groups and older teens.

In the 2021 Regular Session, the General Assembly passed Act 574, which directed the House Committee on Aging, Children and Youth, Legislative and Military Affairs, and the Senate Interim Committee on Children and Youth to conduct a study of the best practices for reducing the number of children in foster care.

As part of that study, members recently reviewed a report from DCFS on reducing the number of children in foster care.

Arkansas became one of the first states to implement the landmark federal Family First Prevention Services Act. More commonly known as Family First, it is the first major federal child welfare reform effort in decades and impacts every piece of the child welfare system.

Now, in-home services providers are using approved programs eligible for federal funding. These programs emphasize safely preventing children from entering DCFS custody or reunifying them with family as quickly as possible if out-of-home care is necessary.

Family First changes also reinforced the direction in which Arkansas had been heading: that children in foster care should be placed with family until they achieve permanency. The law includes reforms to help keep children safe with their families and avoid the traumatic experience of entering foster care. At the same time, the law stresses the importance of children growing up in families and helps ensure children are placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting to meet their needs when they do come into foster care.

The priority is to place children with safe and appropriate relatives and fictive kin. DCFS staff have worked hard over the last several years to ensure children are placed with relatives and fictive kin when safe and appropriate, with 41% of children placed with relatives statewide as of September 30, 2021 as compared to the 28.1% of children who were placed with relatives statewide as of March 30, 2019.

While we continue our study and work to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system, we encourage you to explore how your family may be able to help.

If you are thinking about adoption, DCFS is encouraging you to fill out an application, go through the process and take the training.

As part of the Every Day Counts campaign, Project Zero took on the challenge of creating a short film about every child currently waiting. Project Zero is a non-profit organization with a mission to diligently and enthusiastically promote adoption through the foster care system with the ultimate goal of finding a forever family for every child who is waiting.

You can find the short films and more information about each child on [**Project Zero's Arkansas Heart Gallery.**](#)